CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION

I feel there is something unexplored about woman that only a woman can explore.

Georgia O’Keeffe

Krishna Sarbadhikary in *Mapping the Future: Indian Women Writing Female Subjectivities* quotes:

Clearly more choices need to be opened up for the fictional counterparts of Indian women and the diversity of their lived experience. One looks forward to the conjoining of literary achievement and social commitment in the writer’s construction of strong, self-reliant, purposeful, caring, female subjects who are able to step out of their middle class concerns. (161)

Yashoda Bhat in *The Image of Women in Indian Literature* said, “What is now needed is the projection of more, and more new role-models. The changes going on in the relationships in a domestic set up need to be portrayed more widely” (41). The above mentioned quotations reflect the demand for a changed depiction of women characters, and their approach to life, and their problems. What has been depicted has realistically reflected the plight of women, and their dilemmas up to the present. But more potential traits are needed to cater to the present, and to the future.

The women around the world have improved their status in terms of educational attainment, political freedom, employment accessibility, decision making status etc., compared to the centuries before. But compared to the status of men, they are still far behind, and in that sense no society in the world exhibits gender equality.
If we examine the position of women in the Indian society, it is evident that the subordination of women is closely related to the evolution, and construction of the very idea of feminine gender in the society. It is seen that gender construction has its roots in the social norms, and values. And hence it can be said that the gender inequality is perpetuated through gender construction.

A close reading of the novels of Indian women writers writing in English shows a tremendous awareness of the problems of the women, and it is revealed in their novels depending on the theme. The contribution of women writers in general is immense, and they are in fact playing a positive role in highlighting the dilemmas, the quest for identity, and the challenges confronting women today. First of all by the words of Anuradha Roy in *Patterns of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers*, “through their fictional creations, women writers participate in, reject, and redefine in different ways the traditional images” (44). Secondly it can be said by the words of Jasbir Jain in *Women’s Writing: Text and Context*, “the act of writing has enabled them to move outside the narrow role of man’s help meet, outside the role of the seductress, the angel or the witch” (9). Thirdly, it is noticed by Kalpana in *Dialogism and Cultural Identity of Indian Women in Fiction* as, “consciously or uncounciously the woman writer takes up the task of portraying women’s anguish either matter-of-fact or in a subversive manner” (121). Fourthly, in an era of women’s awakening, and crusade, the focus is on the men-women relationship in the changed society.

Shashi Deshpande is equally an observer, and an experimentalist. This is quite true because she has dealt with the problems of middle-class educated women in India, with an eye for the literary qualities of her work. For Shashi Deshpande,
feminism is using the stamina used to endure the torments for the betterment of life. This is what she tries to bring out through her novels. In an interview with Lakshmi Holmstrom, published as “Shashi Deshpande talks to Lakshmi Holmstrom” (An Interview) reproduced in The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande, Shashi Deshpande reveals:

Feminism is not a matter of theory. It is difficult to apply Kate Millet or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in India. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husband, children or about not being married, not having children etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is no, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experiences. And I actually feel that a lot of people in India are feminists without realizing it. ….. For me feminism is translating what is used up in endurance into something positive a real strength. (248)

After an examination of the women characters depicted in the novels by the novelist Shashi Deshpande, chosen for study, one can come to the following inferences. Despite undergoing domestic colonization, and sometimes even societal violence, women who have internalized traditional values, exhibit rare courage to carry on the burden of life after making minor adjustments.

It is essential that women need not accept everything as part of their fate. There are instances wherein the family is responsible for the suffering. In such cases, they should learn to find a solution. In this regard, to awaken women to their rights,
powers, and potential is the foremost need of the hour, because injustice against them will continue as long as they remain reconciled to the myth of feminity.

The history of reform – whether colonial or indigenous or nationalist – undertaken by men, and by women does not seem very inspiring, freighted as it is with many kinds of patriarchal assumptions, and involved as it is in recasting women. She wanted to portray the whole society in her writings. But somehow, as the characters took shape, all the protagonists turned out to be women. Perhaps, as a woman, she is more sensitive to women’s issues, and family relationships. The inner working of the female psyche holds a great fascination for Deshpande, and the reader is made to perceive things through a woman’s point of view.

In an interview to Prasanna Sree published as Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande – A Study, Deshpande said,

Cruelty and oppression should not be there between the two genders. This is my idea of feminism. We are all human beings and we should all have the right to live our lives. There are struggles of being women, in this patriarchal society, it is hard. So this is the picture I present in my novels. (155)

Deshpande’s women, though on the brink of revolt, do not revolt openly. Their traditional roles gain primacy over their newly acquired, modernized, and professional roles. Shashi Deshpande in her novels foregrounds the silence of women, the passive acceptance of the roles assigned to them.
In the same interview to Prasanna Sree published as *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande – A Study*, Deshpande said:

We are not independent, nor do we have our own identity. We are still appendage to men because our society is shaped like that. Women without male are still little lacking in status. . . My idea of feminism is like . . . a woman is also an individual like man with lot of capabilities and potentials. She has every right to develop all that. . . she has every right to live her life, to develop her qualities, to take her decisions, to be independent, and to take charge of her own destiny. . . all these things are part of my being, a feminist. (154-155)

Shashi Deshpande’s focus begins with the house. As a family settlement the house not only provides shelter but is ranked amongst the most immediate space within which Indian women can hope to situate themselves. It provides the basic framework within which women can compose, and recollect themselves. It ensures them with a destiny. The novelist does not focus on the décor, or the distribution of objects in the house, she stresses the interiors of the mind. Marriage, the promised end in the traditional society, becomes only another enclosure that restricts the movement towards autonomy, and self-realization. Shashi Deshpande has realistically expressed the misery, and pain experienced by women in a male dominated society. Her vision of life is optimistic. All her protagonists are passive rebels. They all try to adapt themselves to the society as it is, and in that process they are discovering themselves, new ways of living, and new ways of functioning. In this respect Shashi Deshpande approaches literature differently. Women’s struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find, and preserve her identity as wife, mother, and
most important of all, as human being is Shashi Deshpande’s major concern in her important stories.

In an interview with Geetha Gangadharan published as “Denying the Otherness” The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande, Shashi Deshpande has made the following observation which can sum up her responsibility as a writer:

Women have been quite suppressed, quite oppressed. We middle class people with education are quite lucky. But a large section of Indian women are suffering even today. We have women going about with ghunghat on their faces . . . We have many people advocating Sati, who consider dowry a necessity, who count it a loss when a girl is born as profit when a boy is born. It is this abysmal difference that I want to do away with, as a feminist. (254)

In all the novels of Shashi Deshpande, each character has a story to tell. She portrays life in the middle class society as she sees it in reality. She does not add colour to reality through her imagination but presents it as it is. The characters are fictional. But the situations are real. She looks at society in a neutral way. She knows that the society has its good, and bad aspects. She expresses her feelings towards society through her characters. Shashi Deshpande conveys the message that the society is what we think, and believe, and not what it thinks or believes about us. She presents both the positive, and the negative aspects of the society, and how it affects different individuals through her different characters.

Institutions in the society - family, religion, caste etc., reinforce, and sustain subordination of women. They do not question patriarchal values, and structures
which maintain an unequal position of women in the family. Empowerment of women is the solution to end subordination. Through empowerment women would acquire economic, social, political power, and take part in the decision making. The process of empowerment to achieve gender equality can begin with a positive attitudinal change towards women as a whole. In the interview with Prasanna Sree published as *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande – A Study*, Deshpande said:

> My focus is on women. Even in the real life, during the last 30-40 years, you see women have changed so much. There is a lot of change in the attitude of women, but there is no change in men. This is the reality I’ve seen. Men are reluctant to change. They still expect things to be what they were. But I don’t mean to say that all men are hopeless. Certainly men will change, hopefully... one thing is true, that men have not changed very much. They are changing. (152)

Shashi Deshpande appears to believe that by not protesting, and offering resistance, the women have to blame themselves for their own victimization. She, therefore, suggests that they themselves have to break the shackles that have kept them in a state of captivity for several centuries. Finding themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by society, her women attempt to assert their individuality, and confront their husbands in search of freedom. They try to redefine human relationships. Without rejecting outright the cultural, and social background, they realize the need to live in the family but reject the roles prescribed to them by the society. They try to achieve self-identity, and independence within the confines of marriage. Thus they manage to extricate themselves from male dominance. At the
same time, they are not willing to forgo the security marriage offers them. In short, Shashi Deshpande’s women want the best of both the worlds.

A close reading of the novels of Shashi Deshpande clearly indicate their preoccupation with the different problems women face. It should be noted that she has not blamed men for all the problems that the women face. The novelist has tried to project strong women capable of surviving all the ordeals as far as possible. The women in Indian fiction are emerging out of darkness, throwing off their legacy of humiliation, dependence, and resignation, and reaching out for an equitable share of man’s worldly, and spiritual goods.

Instead of bemoaning their fate or silently undergoing all kinds of hardships, and agonies, women of the present times are courageously handling crises. It is true that they have not achieved complete freedom or total immunity or solutions to all their problems. They still have to traverse many a difficult path. They still have to prove their worth.

Shashi Deshpande in her fiction deals essentially with the empowerment of women, and her novels offer a convenient theoretical framework to expound her viewpoint. In all her novels we can see the process of empowerment of her women characters through different stages. The first stage of empowerment is visible when they can distance themselves from a given situation, and recognize the structures of power. The protagonists learn to analyse the situation in which they are. The next stage of this process is when these women characters experience the change of not only being able to understand the domination but resist it. Hence their courage to protest is experienced. In the third stage, a more mature stage, realization emerges.
The present study takes up **Empowerment of Women as Reflected in Select Novels of Shashi Deshpande.** In the chapter Introduction an attempt has been made to trace the status of women in the Indian society down the ages in order to know to what extent social justice was rendered to the women folk from time to time. Since time immemorial there had been happiness, and celebration in families where a son was born. The birth of a daughter was not a lovely or amusing occasion. It is also discussed in this chapter that in ancient days, women used to enjoy equal status, and privileges with men in all fields of life. They even had the liberty to choose their husbands. But with the passing of time, the condition of women had a vast change. They were treated as slaves, and remained secondary to men. Young girls were married at a very tender age. Sati was also practiced. During British rule, and after independence many efforts were made for improving the status of women in India. In recent days women claim to have won their fundamental rights. They speak of having attained equal position with that of men. This is true. Even then the problems like dowry, female infanticide, domestic violence, and so on are still triumphing in the society. The present study traces out the reason behind this.

The role of literature, its functions, and its great service to the humanity are also vividly brought out in the first chapter. The discussion further adds the beginnings, and the history of Indian Writing in English. The changes undergone by the Indian literature is also brought out. The first chapter also tries to set the context for a discussion of the concept of empowerment, its emergence, and its components. Women empowerment in India is a challenging task as we need to acknowledge the fact that gender based discrimination is a deep rooted social malice practiced in India in many forms since thousands of years. The cruelty is not going to disappear in a few years or for that matter by attempting to work at it through half-hearted attempts.
Formulating laws, and policies are not enough as it is seen that most of the times these laws, and policies just remain on paper. The ground situation on the other hand just remains the same, and in many instances worsens further. Addressing the hatred of gender discrimination, and women empowerment in India is a long drawn battle against powerful structural forces of the society which are against women's growth, and development.

Further this chapter gives a vivid account of Feminism. The discussion further adds the popular writers, the role of these writers in the context of feminist literary criticism, and that of post colonial criticism is discussed. This chapter also wishes to see the Indian women writers of nineteenth, and twentieth century. It tries to set the context for a discussion of the novels of these writers. Then a brief introduction about the selected author, and her works are given.

The second chapter – Transcending the Boundaries of Feminity – discusses the different aspects of feminist issues. For this study the novels selected are *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows*, and *That Long Silence*. This chapter is designed to show how in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saritha seeks freedom without impinging on her obligations, and responsibilities, and achieves harmony in life. It shows how she undergoes a trauma when her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life, and how boldly she stands up to the situation, and boldly accepts the challenges of her own responsibility. Further this chapter shows how Indu, the protagonist in *Roots and Shadows*, emerging succesfully as a woman of determination, not yielding to the dictates of the patriarchal society. This chapter records how she defies the depleted traditions, pushes aside all her fears about her imagined inadequacies, and asserts herself as an individual.
Finally this chapter traces out how Jeya of *That Long Silence* is seen always engaged in searching her own identity. Set typically against the Indian backdrop *That Long Silence* raises the eternal question whether woman lives for them or for someone- their husband or children.

The second chapter also traces the growth of the protagonists from a state of weakness, feeling of failure to that of relaxation. Shashi Deshpande accomplishes this through self-assessment, and self-criticism. The stark reality around, and the fictional representation of women necessitates that they remain their identity despite constraints. Mercifully women have reached a part of their destination, and only some more distance remains to be covered. So in this transitional phase, they have to be alert, and capitalize on their own merits, and strengths to pave way for a better future.

In her novels Shashi Deshpande sees the need to harmonize the man-woman relationship as equal partners. The relationship between man, and woman is very similar to that between the master, and his slave. However, the empowered woman has come to know her place, and position in family, and society. She is conscious of her individuality, and believes that woman, as a companion of man, and gifted with equal mental capacities, has the right to participate in the minute details of the activities of man, and she has the same right to freedom, and liberation as man. The empowered woman has come to signify the awakening of woman into a new realisation. There is no victory in the subjugation, and destruction of the male. The need is to see each other’s need for space, freedom of expression, and love.

Atrey, and Kirpal also reinforce this in *A Feminist Study of her Fiction*, “aggressive feminism does not ring true in the Indian context, and that for Indian
women selfhood will only come from probing and thinking for oneself” (7). Deshpande doesn’t believe in taking ‘the militant anti-men and anti-marriage stance’. The need of the hour for a happy married life is a proper co-ordination, and a reasonable mutual understanding between husband, and wife. Female protagonists in Deshpande’s novels stand apart from that of their counterparts in the writings of many contemporary women writers. Sandwiched between tradition and modernity, illusion and reality, and the mask and the face, they lead a life of restlessness. Progressing along the axis of delimiting restrictions, self-analysis, protest, and self-discovery, they try to create both physical as well as psychological space for themselves to grow on their own. It is clear that like the model new-woman, Deshpande’s protagonists are all educated, proactive, and progressive, moving on fearless. They rebel against the dictates of their domestic duties, and social sanctions, challenge ‘male - devised orthodoxies about women’s nature, capacities, and roles’, and existential insecurity.

Transgressing the socially conditioned boundaries of the body, they frankly, and frequently enter into a dialogic relationship with their bodies, both within, and without; represent values, beliefs, and ideas which are modern, and stand in opposition to the traditional ones. Being the representatives of the new generation of self-actualizing women, they seek to figure out new ways of dealing with their problems, instead of running away from them, and realizing that the solutions lie within themselves. These new women have a balanced, practical approach to their problems. They realize that victory does not lie in the subjugation, and destruction of the male, rather it lies in bringing him to see the indispensability of each other’s space. The new women start up as rebellious, and discontented, but end up renewed, and rejuvenated.
The third chapter Emerging Identity of Women analyses an ongoing process of development. The novels chosen for this study are *A Matter of Time*, *The Binding Vine*, and *Small Remedies*. This chapter unravels how in *A Matter of Time* Sumi, a deserted wife is dauntless, and bitterness linked up with invisible chains of patriarchal pressure, and other family responsibilities. It records how with courage, dignity, responsibility, and independent spirit even after desertion by her husband, she has developed a new identity. Further this chapter discusses how Urmila in *The Binding Vine* is morbidly pre-occupied with the problems of death, and rape. And she is a typical feminine voice who struggles through her own gloomy domestic atmosphere, not subduing but revolting, trying to sort out things for herself. This novel provides room for the analyses of the woman characters in the postmodern perspective too.

Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies* explores the lives of two women, one obsessed with music, and the other a passionate believer in Communism. Both of them break away from their families to seek fulfilment in public life. Savitribai Indorekar (Bai), born into an orthodox Hindu family, elopes with her Muslim lover, and accompanist, Ghulaam Saab, to pursue a career in music. Gentle, strong-willed Leela, on the other hand, gives her life to the Party, and to work with the factory workers of Bombay. Fifty years after these events have been set in motion, Madhu, Leela's niece, travels to Bhavanipur, Savitribai's home in her last years, to write a biography of Bai. Caught in her own despair over the loss of her only son Aditya, Madhu tries to make sense of the lives of Bai, and those around her, and in doing so, seeks to find a way out of her own grief.

The novels of Shashi Deshpande usually dwell upon the emergence of women from marginality to centrality, and from role to individuality. The emerging new womanhood of Shashi Deshpande dismisses the submissive, shy, sweet, and
sentimental women from the creative world, and intentionally invested in her women qualities like courage, independence, intellectual energy, rationality, and ambition. Thus she has created autonomous, and self-determining women in her fictional world. The writer demonstrates in her novels that what women demand for their freedom, growth, and development is not necessarily very difficult conditions – some space to grow, chances to attain, and use knowledge, exposure to the society, freedom to express their desires, and demands. For the subversion of sexist ideologies, Shashi Deshpande invests her female protagonists with power, and ability, energy, and enthusiasm, courage, and commitment, and other qualities of womanhood. These new women characters make the authorial voice of feminist reformism audible in her novels.

This chapter also analyses the protagonists in the light of Freudian Psycho analysis to study their inner struggles. The tool chosen for this study is defense mechanism. Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic tool defense mechanism is used to study the protagonists’ individual self. The protagonists use defense mechanism, and find better, healthy ways of coping with the anxiety, and distress.

The fourth chapter – Manifestation of Empowered Women – discusses the role of literature in empowering women through the selected novels of Shashi Deshpande. The novels chosen for this study are *Moving On*, *In the Country of Deceit*, and *Ships That Pass*.

*Moving On* is a story that begins, conventionally enough, with a woman's discovery of her father's diary. Manjari unlocks the past through its pages, rescuing old memories, and recasting events, and responses. She is a rebellious daughter, who threatens to throw her life out of gear again. The ensuing struggle to reconcile
nostalgia with reality, and the fire of the body with the desire for companionship races to an unexpected resolution, twisting, and turning through complex emotional landscapes.

In the novel *In the Country of Deceit* Devayani chooses to live alone in the small town of Rajnur after her parents’ death, ignoring the gently voiced disapproval of her family, and friends. Teaching English, creating a garden, and making friends with Rani, a former actress who settles in the town with her husband, and three children, Devayani’s life is tranquil, imbued with a hard-won independence. Then she meets Ashok Chinappa, Rajnur’s District Superintendent of Police, and they fall in love despite the fact that Ashok is much older, married, and – as both painfully acknowledge from the beginning – it is a relationship without a future.

The central theme of *Ships That Pass* is marriage, and the author's reflections on the same. Radhika, a somewhat directionless young girl who has just graduated gets a request from her brother-in-law Shaan to come, and visit her sister Tara who is struck with some mysterious sickness. Previously, Radhika had, on a whim, agreed to marry Ghanashyam, a decision that she begins to think might not have been the best after a few conversations with her fiancé. At her sister's place, she finds the apparently ideal couple are falling apart. Even as she comes to realise that her sister's life might not have been as perfect, and easy as it looked, she struggles with complications in her own life as she falls for an older man, Raam. In her quest for the truth, Radhika finds truths about herself that she was probably not prepared to handle. Shashi Deshpande depicts the psychic functioning, and social behaviour of women in her fictional world. Her writings can be considered as ‘factual fiction’. They teach the readers the art of understanding female psychic experiences, and widen their notions of freedom, equality, tolerance, and true love.
An analysis of the women characters of Shashi Deshpande in this chapter reveals the presence of a definite quest for a true self-identity. Shashi Deshpande’s women-centered novels give us a psychological insight into the working of a woman’s mind; specially one belonging to a typically Indian background. The years of societal, and cultural conditioning teaches the Indian women to be self-effacing, submissive, and subordinate to man, suffering of a patriarchal society in silence.

Deshpande, in all her novels, explores, and exposes the feminine consciousness imprisoned within the four walls of domesticity. She thinks that problems of women in India are further compounded by their being made to believe that they are custodians of culture, and traditions, thus making them feel personally responsible for any breakdowns in traditional social structures. Thus, Deshpande’s protagonists are caught between tradition, and modernity, or, by extension between illusion, and reality. Nevertheless they disown ritualistic, and tradition bound life in order to explore their true selves. They realize, freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do, and the determination, and tenacity to adhere to it. That alone can bring harmony in life.

Thus we can see that in all her novels Shashi Deshpande talks about the problems of women, and also gives the solutions for these problems. The solutions do not come from outside but from within. The protagonists undergo a transition, and accept the unchanged situation with self-realization that they cannot change the situation but have to change their outlook, and attitude to make their life durable. In all her novels Shashi Deshpande demonstrates successfully, and convincingly the sources of traps, and violence awaiting women at various stages of their existence, and also suggests someways, and means of how they can possibly overcome the same through courage, and confidence.
It can be observed that most of her women build harmonious relationship in a spirit of give-and-take, and in a mood of compromise, and understanding. They undergo the process of transformation, and change their perspective to cope with life that remains the same. They do not change the situation but change their outlook. This is the common thread found in many of her novels. In order to explore the plurality, and complexity of female experiences, and to point out the possible areas of improvement, and development for women, Shashi Deshpande has convincingly created wonderful portraits of the contemporary realities of womanhood in her fiction. Shashi Despande not only reveals the realities of womanhood in her respective social contexts, but also make ardent advocacy for a social change to alleviate the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual burdens of women. She stands for humanitarianism, and she expresses infinite compassion for the women. As Radhika rightly says in Ships That Pass, “Girls were protected and sheltered then. Today we go out into the world, and we know all about life” (5).

All the new empowered modern women characters of Shashi Deshpande are constantly, and consciously engaged in a battle against the ideological impositions, and power operations of patriarchy which not only believes that men are, and should be, superior to women but also curtails the free growth of women, and reduces them to second class citizens. These new women characters undergo this struggle of breaking their own psychological conditioning, and the gendered definitions of feminity. The novelist proves that this struggle is painful but unavoidable because nothing worthwhile in the life of women comes without a battle against patriarchal prejudices. For the new women characters like Madhu, Devayani, and Radhika their battle against self, and society seems to be an empowering process which later brings success as well as strength, and status to them.
Shashi Deshpande, by making her heroines undergo stages of self-introspection, and self-reflection, makes them evolve themselves into more liberated individuals than what their biological nature or culture have sanctioned. Freud’s Psycho analytic tool, Intrapersonal psychotherapy is made use to interpret the protagonists’ self-realization. The protagonists do not feel at peace within. They introspect philosophically, and reach to the conclusion that one has to shape as well as face the events of one’s life. They can attain peace of mind by their own efforts. It has to be created within. Towards the end, the protagonists are ready to face life.

It must be noted that there have been many amendments to end the discrimination against women, and empower women in all aspects of life. Gender equality is enshrined in the Indian constitution, and the constitution empowers the state to end the gender based discrimination against women. There is reservation of seats in local bodies, and municipalities, and another law is being envisioned for reservation in parliament. But the sad part is that all these laws, and amendments have become toothless as the fundamental problems lies in the attitude of the society which is highly biased against women. The only solution is for women to come together as a unifying force, and initiate self-empowering actions at the ground level.

The novels being examined in this study cover the period 1980-2012, and interestingly, the problems affecting, women, and their position remain the same. Despite changing perceptions, the issues boil down to the need for effective implementation of laws against the victimization of women, and more welfare measures for the betterment of women. On the other hand, women themselves should become more self-reliant, and seek opportunities that make life more meaningful, and worth living. Women have to face life with all its problems, responsibilities, and
paradoxes without losing the identity, and individuality, as it is the essence, and truth of life.

Shashi Deshpande believes that for women empowerment, there must be a positive attitudinal change in women. This thought is evident in her novels. In *Dark Holds No Terrors* when Saritha is staying with her father she is visited by her neighbour women for consultation. To her shock, she notices that many of them suffer:

The myriad complaints, the varying symptoms, she thought, if put together would provide a world of data for a treatise on the condition of women. Backache, headache, leucorrhea, menorrhagia, loss of appetite, burning feet and ....all the indignities of a woman’s life, borne silently and as long as possible, because how do you tell anyone about these things? (107).

Again as a feminist physician Saritha explodes:

Everything kept secret, their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them. Stupidly, silly martyrs, she thought, idiotic heroines. Going on with their tasks, and destroying themselves in the bargain, for nothing but a meaningless modesty. Their unconscious, unmeaning heroism, born out of the myth of the self-sacrificing martyred woman, did not arouse either her pity or her admiration. It made her angry. (107)

Like Saritha, Shashi Deshpande’s other female protagonists too believe that women should be aware of their rights, and needs, and that without the slightest guilt
feeling, they should assert their potential needs, and desires. All these prominent female characters of Shashi Deshpande stand for a positive attitudinal change in women. These characters are powerful enough to convince the women readers that it is high time to stop their pretence of submission to the traditional drama of male supremacy.

In *Roots and Shadows*, the intelligent, and emancipated female character Indu observes that in a woman’s life this training for pretence, and submission begins at the very early stage itself. In a patriarchal country like India, women are brought up as dependents on men. They try to live in accordance with the Manu Smrithi which demands that women in their childhood must be nurtured by their parents. In the teenage they must be protected by their brothers, after marriage guarded by their husbands, and in old age taken care of by their children. They have imbibed the traditional values so much that they cannot live all by themselves. It needs courage, and will power to come out of this situation, and live all alone. In *Roots and Shadows* Indu feels:

As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive, why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive, And I ....I had watched them and found to be true. There had to be, if not the substance, at least the shadow of submission.....(158)

The theory of deconstruction which paves way for women empowerment is seen in Shashi Deshpande’s novels. The joint family system which upholds the value
of living together, and which existed in India a few decades ago, is described in *Roots and Shadows*. In each system, usually a male head or the patriarch assumed supreme power, and was respected, and obeyed by all the family members. But in *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande deconstructs the system by replacing a woman in his position with lots of power, intelligence, wealth, and prudence. Hence the novelist subverts the unwritten but the unviolable law that men are born to dominate, and women to be subordinate. In *The Binding Vine* also, Urmila controls the family well in the absence of her husband. Urmila, the protagonist in *The Binding Vine* becomes the mouthpiece of the author herself when she says:

Well, I don’t know about others, I can only speak for myself and the answer is . . . I don’t like men who try to dominate women. I don’t like women who do it to men, either. But yes, a man must be firm. . . there is no other answer. Women do want to be dominated. . . even to force your will on another is to be brutal. (133).

By placing women in key positions, the novelist conveys the idea that patriarchy is not natural, it is man-made. Hence it can be changed, and it should be changed.

Shashi Deshpande believes that the change in power structure also brings out women empowerment. The change in the traditional role of wives due to higher education, and employment of women is also presented in the fiction of Shashi Deshpande. She has created a number of wives who are earning members in almost all her novels. When the wife becomes an earning member, there occurs a change in the equilibrium of the power structure within the family. Then father is no more the omnipotent patriarch or the undisputed head of the family. Through her novels Shashi
Deshpande shows how with many tensions, and difficulties, the family is shifting from an authoritarian to a democratic type of relationship. In such a context husband, and wife are partners, equally responsible for the good of the family. The novelist purposefully creates certain situations where women have to take the upper hand or assume the leadership of the family.

For women empowerment, Shashi Deshpande also lays emphasis on female bonding, which seems to provide relief to suffering women. One comes across the role of sisters, mothers, and friends coming to the rescue of the victim or the harassed, and hapless one seeking out some female relative or friend to mitigate her suffering. In society too, one finds women coming together to fight against alcoholism, dowry menace, and also to form self-help groups, and pool their resources. In Shashi Deshpande’s *The Binding Vine*, Urmila tries to help Shakutai in getting the rapist of her daughter Kalpana punished, and tries to spend time with her finding out all about her. The result is that Shakutai wants her to take up the responsibility of her younger daughter. At this juncture, it should be noted that the women writers therefore have to write constructively to provide role models for the oppressed women. By reinterpreting old myths, and questioning the validity of traditions, and customs that circumscribe women in narrow slots, Indian women novelists have to continue challenging the operating codes of morality which subordinate women in the social structure.

Shashi Deshpande’s message to the women society is ‘self-realization’. For emancipation, one should realize one’s own self. This message is well brought out in her novels. In *A Matter of Time*, Gopal, the husband of Sumi, and father of three daughters, withdraws from his duties, and responsibilities without any explanation. Then Sumi gravely takes the responsibility by bringing up her children by doing the
work of a teacher. Shashi Deshpande’s main message is that the women should not wait for external help, and support, instead they should find ways of self-help. Shashi Deshpande reminds her readers that they too have limitless energy, and potential. She traces the root cause of women’s oppression to their lack of exposure to social, economical, political, cultural, and other important spheres of activity.

A central concern of Shashi Deshpande’s novels is man-woman relationship within marriage, and outside marriage. In *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*, Shashi Deshpande tells:

Feminism, I read somewhere, is a movement that has grown out of and built upon prevailing social needs. I can see how true this is in India, where it has grown out of our own society, out of local specific issues and has addressed them directly. The truth is that we cannot go back. That a great number of people now live in nuclear families, that many women have to go out and work, that stresses are marking relationships more vulnerable – these are facts. It is in the context of this reality that changes are required in the man-woman relationship.

(85)

While dealing with this pivotal theme, she consciously deviates to other relevant feminist themes – motherhood, widowhood, mother-daughter relationship, female education, and independence, and self-actualisation needs of women, and the like. Being a writer of feminist consciousness, she uses her pen to fight against social evils such as the dowry system, child marriage, rape, and sexual violence, illiteracy of women, male child preference, and commodification of women.
The dowry system is a traditional, and wide-spread social custom practiced by almost all castes, and communities, and religious sections in India. A woman’s share of her parent’s property is given at the time of her marriage. Due to this system most arranged marriages have become a business transaction that involves crude bargaining, and humiliating experiences for the bride, and her parents. Shashi Deshpande also ponders over, and wonders at this system because the whole amount of money most probably will be spent for extravagant wedding feast, and purchase of costly clothes, and glittering ornaments. A number of grief-stricken fathers, and mothers who worry about raising money for the wedding of their daughters are presented in Shashi Deshpande’s novels. In *Roots and Shadows* Padmini’s parents are extremely worried about the heavy dowry they have to pay for her marriage which is in fact not very desirable. Indu, the protagonist of the novel, is extremely reactive to business-like transactions, and bargaining for dowry that occurs in marriages, when she says:

And hadn’t the picture not for . . alone, but for most brides in this country, always been false? Behind the façade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, what was marriage after all, but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue? (14).

In *The Binding Vine* Shakuntala is an another mother who struggles hard to save money to marry her daughters off. Shashi Deshpande strongly supports anti-dowry consciousness raising programmes while describing the marriage of Madhu, and Som in her novel *Small Remedies*. Madhu has no money to offer as her dowry as she spent all her wealth for her education. Som is a doctor who values Madhu more than anything. In the same novel Shashi Deshpande presents an ideal couple Leela,
and Joe, where Joe is an eminent Christian doctor marrying a penniless widow Leela, after waiting for fifteen years for her consent.

Similarly in *Roots and Shadows* Indu’s marriage is without dowry. Then Saru, and Manu in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* also have a marriage of their own choice where dowry was quite immaterial. Another striking fact about these marriages is that there is no extravagance or large crowds at the wedding. These brides do not give undue importance to gold, and costly ornaments. Shashi Deshpande is raising her voice against the evils of dowry. In order to ensure happiness, and a comfortable existence for their daughters parents struggle hard to satisfy the indescent, and incessant demands of bridegroom’s party. It is to be noted that dowry is a transfer of wealth from men of a family to those of another with women acting as a vehicle of transfer (as brides) or as a watchdogs (as mother-in-law, and sister-in-law); its significance is not primarily economic but political in the sense that it defines a power relation between the man, and woman. Hence marriage, which is made out to be an inevitable, and indispensable goal in every woman’s life. It should be re-evaluated. Marriages at the cost of dowry deaths, marital cruelty, divorce or even self-negation should be avoided. Whether or not to marry, and whom to marry should be left to the woman.

Shashi Despande likes women to be empowered in marriage, and motherhood. In *Roots and Shadows* Indus’s aunt, Narmada Atya is a childless widow. She had a very hard life at her in-law’s house. “Her in-laws had, true to tradition, ill-treated her after her husband’s death. And then, grandfather had brought her home. Her home, where she worked from morning to night, every day of her life, expecting nothing” (36). In the same novel, Indu has to face an unpleasant interrogation by Akka for not having a child though it is only a few years after her marriage: “I suppose you’re
taking some of the things they take now to prevent having children. When are you going to have one? After your menopause?” (38). Patriarchal society deems reproductivity as the greatest creativity of women, and assumes power over women’s body, reproductive capacity, etc. Being an emancipated women, Indu has an entirely different opinion about marriage, and having children.

By presenting Indu as a married woman, who is not yet ready for motherhood because of her serious engagements, Shashi Deshpande challenges the myth that motherhood is the absolute fulfilment of women’s lives. According to the novelist, motherhood must be a matter of conscious choice, and decision made by women. Hence Shashi Deshpande presents a powerful female character Madhu in *Small Remedies* who has control over both production, and reproduction. In spite of her conscious delay in embracing maternity, she believes that “a child’s birth is a rebirth for a woman. It is becoming part of the world once again” (88). When she decides to become a mother, she postpones her creative, and productive endeavours for a few years, and gladly opts to stay with her son Adit in order to enjoy the thrill, and bliss of motherhood which is in fact a metamorphosis for her. She says:

> His dependence fills me with delight, my power over him awes me. I indulge him, enjoying my power to transform his tears into smiles. I flaunt my feelings, there is no need to hide them. It’s not just legitimate, it’s something to be proud of, this mother love… mother love is one of the great wonders of this world, we tell one another. (183-184)

Marriage is a social institution in which an emotionally intelligent man, and woman are working together in partnership. This partnership becomes highly
productive, and fulfilling when there are higher degrees of intimacy, mutual respect, and admiration. In a sense it would be a win-win relationship, enriching the man, and woman alike. Shashi Deshpande presents powerful female characters who not only intellectualise their experiences, but also give due importance to the emotional aspects of their experiences. Her protagonists Saru, Indu, Madhu, Jaya, Sumi, and Urmila are intelligent, educated, and emotionally mature women, and most of them are employed too. By presenting them as empowered women, intellectually, and emotionally more empowered than their husbands, Shashi Deshpande seeks to change the unfair power relations existing between men, and women even in the most intimate circle of family.

Shashi Deshpande convinces her readers that for the real liberation of women, they should find out a world of creative, and fulfilling activity beyond the domestic walls. That is why Shashi Deshpande quotes at the beginning of her novel *The Binding Vine*, “What were the use of creation, if I were entirely contained here?” (6). Shashi Deshpande reminds the Indian readers that the human resources of a half of the population should not be wasted or misused. Depicting the successful doctor Saru, the well known journalist Indu, the committed social worker Leela, the great musician Savitribai Indorekar, and others, the novelist communicates a very relevant, and important message that women’s energy, creativity, and intelligence can be wisely tapped, and used not only for the welfare of the family but also for the betterment of the society. When they become significant contributors, they will become visible in the society, and will be respected, and appreciated by the society.

It is interesting to note the different stages of the developments of the feminist consciousness, and female freedom in the women characters of Shashi Deshpande. The first category of women presented by Shashi Deshpande are women who lack a desire to change as the conventional mode of living is quite convenient, comfortable,
and less challenging for them. Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terror* is an example of this type of women. They are women who are really to co-operate with those who keep them in subordination. Such women have foolish sense of complacency, and lack of concern for other women. The novelist has presented another set of women who are covered by the clouds of ignorance, and absolutely lack the awareness for the need to change. Most of them are illiterate women or women who do not know the rights of women as human beings. They are overburdened, and exploited all through their lives. Narmada in *Roots and Shadows*, and Shakuntala in *The Binding Vine* are examples of this exploited category of women. The central female characters of the novels take immense pains to inform these women about their own rights, and possibilities. The last, but the most important type of women are the new women characters who have the will, and wisdom for a change. They are politically enlightened women who deeply understand their privileged fellow women who sadly yet successfully suppress their sorrows, and sufferings, and lead a life of self-sacrifice. They are the liberated women or new women who are intelligent, independent, self-confident, and self-sufficient.

According to Shashi Deshpande, women’s problem is so deep rooted that it urges the women readers to overcome fear, and anxiety, and to take a brave decision to grow, and succeed. The socially constructed ideals of maleness, and femaleness obstruct freethinking, and freedom of choice, and action. External barriers such as social restriction, and patriarchal expectations become negligible for women who overcome self-imposed restrictions, and inner barriers of limiting thoughts, and beliefs regarding themselves. Through her central characters she conveys the idea that it is not necessary for women to wait for the approval of the society but that they should go along with their goals. Finally Shashi Deshpande believes that the first, and
the most important step in women’s empowerment is conscientisation or awareness raising. She prompts her women readers to make an inward journey to realise the depth of the dehumanizing process which they have been undergoing due to excessive male demands. She does not leave the readers at this juncture of self-pity, and frustration but lead them to a regenerative process by providing them ideological weapons, and the ideal of self-help.

Thus all her novels have a particular significance for today’s Indian society, in which the girls have to put up not only with the social discrimination, but also with the victimization by their near, and dear ones. To come out all these social evils one has to be empowered. Shashi Deshpande offers new insights into Indian women who are seen moving slowly but surely from subordination to autonomy, from Dharma to individual goals, from sexual lucidity to sexual emancipation, and from silence to speech. In *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*, Shashi Deshpande tells:

> Whether we admit it or not, most of us who are adapting to this changing world, gracefully or otherwise, are practicing feminism. We don’t have to sport any labels. Ask any woman, ‘Do you believe in gender equality?’ and she may retort, ‘What’s that?’ but ask her instead, ‘Do you think your daughter is a lesser human being, that she should not be educated, should be married early, to anyone, at any price, that she should have nothing in her life apart from her family and home and should stay within the family at all costs, even if it is to suffer or die, getting no support from you once she gets married’ – will she say ‘yes’? Or will it be a ‘no’. But why do I say ‘she’? Most men, I have no doubt, will say ‘no’ too. (85)
For feminists, women’s liberation, and autonomy are not an end in itself, but it is an ongoing process of development, and a constant battle against the traditional ideological operations. As Tapti Lahiri in *Liberating Women* explains:

Ideology is a kind of vast remembrance enveloping everything. We have to know that this skin exists even if it encloses us like a new or like closed eyelids. We have to know that, to change the world, we must constantly try to scratch and tear it. We can never rip the whole thing off, but we must never let it stick or stop being suspicious of it. It grows back and you start again. (119)

Shashi Deshpande’s novels show an appreciation of fine arts. There is scope for further study for future research scholars. Future researchers can do their research on the Role of Men in Empowering Women, Child Empowerment, A Study on the Changing Values of Tradition, Wives’ Place, and Their Roles in the Social Structure, Emotional Intelligence in the novels of Shashi Deshpande, etc.

To sum up, the sensible, and logical presentations of the feminist concerns of Shashi Deshpande through the ideological apparatus of fiction energise, aesthetise, and illuminate the minds of the readers, and empower them for an effective encounter with the stark realities of the androcentric world which they inhabit. Being an androgynist writer, who upholds the value of co-operation, and companionship between men, and women, Shashi Deshpande envisions a world of freedom, knowledge, equality, and hope for both men, and women, and emphasise on what a man, and woman have to give each other, on the mystery of completion, and not on the discussion of separate superiorities. Change will come only if women themselves acknowledge, and articulate the desire, and need for change. Shashi Deshpande also
suggests that active, and independent participation in a consumer society is the road to female emancipation.

Thus in this study the researcher establishes that in all the novels of Shashi Deshpande many dimensions of women empowerment like economic, socio-cultural, interpersonal, sexual, academic, psychological etc is portrayed through various women characters. This is rightly envisaged from the first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* to her latest novel *Ships That Pass*.

In fact, in her novels Shashi Deshpande earnestly endeavours to analyse the questions once raised by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* in order to enable their readers think about the productive possibilities of women’s liberation in an egalitarian social context: “Who knows what woman can be when they are finally free to become themselves? Who knows what women’s intelligence will contribute when it can be nourished without denying love?” (331).